

## Money Really Does Grow on Trees

Pulling a fistful of \$20 dollar bills off the maple tree in your backyard is probably not going to happen. But believe it or not, that maple is very likely one of the better financial investments on your property. Research shows that trees in residential areas may significantly increase the value of your property. For example, an analysis of 844 single family homes in Athens, Georgia showed that homes with an average of five trees in the front yard sold for 3.5 to 4.5 percent more than comparable homes without trees. Along similar lines, there is a classic study that examined fourteen different variables with the potential to influence the price of suburban houses in Manchester, Connecticut and in Greece, New York. In terms of influencing the selling price of those homes, trees were found to rank sixth in importance.

Yet, investing in trees is fairly inexpensive. Typically, a young, ornamental tree can be purchased at a nursery for less than \$150 dollars. Once planted, most trees require watering once a week for three summers, mulching every other year, and structural pruning from time to time. Yet that same tree, twenty years later, could be very easily valued at several thousand dollars through a standard landscape appraisal formula. As the tree grows so does its value.

Planting trees along city rights-of-way and in downtown areas brings indirect economic benefits as well. The shade from tree canopies attracts customers on hot summer days and their greenery can enhance downtown areas. Planting a grove of trees along a thoroughfare will reduce noise levels and hide an unsightly industrial area. In a pilot study by the Center for Urban Horticulture, the “business quality”, the “shopping convenience” and “appealing character” of a community were all found to rate higher when the community contained more green space and landscaping. Research has shown that shoppers were willing to pay up to 12% more for the very same products from businesses in areas with lots of green space. In addition, studies show that tree canopies absorb quite a bit of rainfall, helping to reduce the potential for overflowing storm sewers after heavy rains as well as helping to keep moisture in the soil and available to other plants, especially important in those communities that suffer from drought during the summer months.

Certainly good planning, choosing the right tree species for the site, and available irrigation are key elements to having healthy trees in an urban setting. Additionally, ongoing pruning and maintenance activities will keep your tree healthy and long-lived. Yet trees still turn out to be a good investment. A recent study by the Center for Urban Forest Research, part of the USDA Forest Service Pacific Southwest Research Station, examined the process by which the urban forestry program of a western city with a population of 190,000 justified their “tree budget” of \$2.6 million/year. When all the number crunching was done, quantifiable costs and benefits calculated, the urban forestry program was able to show a **net** annual benefit to the city of \$2.2 million/year. So who knows? Perhaps money really does grow on trees.

*Writer Sue Izard is one of three regional community forestry assistants working for the Idaho Community Forestry Program, a joint partnership between your local Resource Conservation & Development Councils and the Idaho Department of Lands Community Forestry program. For more information on this statewide program please visit: [www.idaho.gov/lands](http://www.idaho.gov/lands) and click on “community forestry.”*